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ABSTRACT

The dominant concept of public education at present can be described as a "service delivery" model. The public wants its children educated, delegates the job to a government agency (the schools), and holds that agency responsible for the delivery of educational services. The problems in public education, however, will not be solved by holding the system accountable. The reason for this is that in any successful educational enterprise, partnership, and not political accountability, must be the dominant relationship. In a partnership approach to education, the student, and not the teacher, is the prime producer of learning, and parents and teachers share in the educational responsibility. The partnership approach would also have the advantage of maximizing resource utilization, increasing accountability of parents and citizen groups, and leading to the "empowerment" of the client population. From a social and economic standpoint, this is a particularly propitious time for changing to a partnership approach. Current research in the areas of alternative education and integrated human services can provide impetus and guidance for policy makers in order to enable them to reverse the crisis in public education. (Author/GC)

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THE BANKRUPTCY OF SERVICE DELIVERY

BY

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(Delivered At The Foundation Lunch Group: Panel on Children
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A headline in this month's Nation's Business reads: "Doomsday for Public Education?" The Schools in Chicago and the major cities of Ohio have been closing and opening with erratic instability. There are many who think the public schools here in New York are on their last leg, with services already depleted beyond the point of austerity and now about to take another plunge downward.

I am pleased to be here today and have a chance to share a concept with you that has occurred to us at the Public Education Association as we have wrestled with this truly awesome situation. It is a concept that may have application to a number of other human services, but I will discuss it only in the context of public education, which we know best, and where we have had our experience.

The concept seems disarmingly simple, but the more we have worked with it, the more we are aware that it is indeed not so simple. Although it sounds like motherhood itself, we find it runs counter to the basic assumptions not only of the public school system, but also to some of our

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own past assumptions as advocacy groups and representatives of parent, citizen, and consumer interests in education. And therein lies its power, as well as some of its difficulties in gaining acceptance, for we are coming to feel that a solution to the problem, if there is one, will come from changes in our own behavior as well as changes in the behavior of those who are running and staffing the schools.

I am well aware that many of you in this room have been just as frustrated as we have been by the many initiatives that have been tried and have failed over the past twenty years. If we stand back and look at it, our failures in public education -- particularly in our cities -- are almost unbelievable. Here we are, the richest society in the history of mankind, and we don't seem to be able to carry out one of the most basic functions of any society -- the education of our children. What's worse, the issue has been recognized for at least two decades, and billions of dollars of federal money, together with further millions of foundation dollars, have been poured into various plans and programs to remedy the situation, and yet even the optimist is hard put to argue that things have improved; most people believe they have gotten worse -- and not just in New York City, but all across the country. Why has this rich and powerful society, with all its ingenuity and technology been unable to solve this problem?

As with any large social phenomenon, there are certainly a number of contributing factors. The one I want to discuss today is one that we

think has been generally overlooked, and which perhaps holds an important key to more successful approaches in the future. It has to do with the basic social and political relationship between communities and their schools.

The dominant equation of public education at present can be described as a "service delivery" model: The public wants its children educated, and it delegates the job to a government agency to accomplish. The relationship between parents and citizens and their public schools in this equation is a political relationship. Because the schools are a government agency, and we are a democratic society, the prime role of the citizen and parent is seen as one of holding the agency "accountable" for accomplishing its assigned function, i.e. for "delivery" of educational services.

We at PEA have certainly done our share of trying to hold the school system accountable, and I would not for a minute suggest that we intend to stop. But the insight we have gained in recent years is that holding the system accountable is not enough, and by itself, will never achieve the goal of turning our very large number of failing public schools into successful institutions.

The reason for this, as we have come to see it -- very forcefully and not just rhetorically -- is that in any successful educational enterprise, political accountability, important as it is, cannot be the domi-

nant relationship. The dominant relationship must be partnership. Another way to put this is that the widespread conception of educational systems as service delivery systems is a misconception. Education cannot be delivered. It can only be the product of a productive learning relationship between teacher and pupil, and between school and community.

One of the experiences that led me to this conclusion occurred a few years ago when I was commissioned to do an article for the City Almanac on "Productivity in the New York City Schools." I did some research in the literature of educational productivity -- much of which is adapted from industrial productivity theory. The more I worked, the more I became convinced that something was fundamentally wrong. The emphasis seemed to be on how to make teachers more productive. At first that seemed fair enough; there are certainly many teachers one might wish could be more productive. But then I began to realize that the teacher was being seen as the prime worker in the education enterprise and the productivity being talked about was not increased learning, but increased delivery of educational services. If it is increased learning that we want, then the prime worker is not the teacher -- it is the student.

Let me pause there for a moment -- for this is often a stumbling block. Many of us in the advocacy-accountability business feel a cold chill running down our backs when we get to this point. Would not such

a concept "let the teachers off the hook?" Does this not just put ammunition into the hands of every lazy, unaccountable, incompetent and racist, teacher and principal in the city -- and back up their incessant claims that if the students fail to learn it is their own fault, not the schools'?

Not at all. I am stating only a simple fact: if it is learning we want, then it is the student who must do the work to produce it. A teacher can "deliver educational services" to a fare-the-well, teach lessons 'til she is blue in the face, and work herself into a state of emotional and physical exhaustion, and no learning will take place unless the student is doing the mental work of learning. The trick to successful teaching and successful schooling is to create conditions under which students will do the necessary work. These conditions are best described in terms of partnership between the teaching and learning partners, not in terms of service delivery.

There is not enough time here to go into the many ramifications of shifting from a "service delivery" to a partnership approach to education, but I will quickly touch on a few: they each deserve much more extended discussion.

1) First, since the student is the prime producer of learning, and since he is not part of the bureaucracy, and not subject to bureaucratic accountability, bureaucracy, and its whole value structure must be seen as irrelevant at best, and obstructive at worst, to true

learning relationships. Good teachers and principals have instinctively known this, and they have kept bureaucracy in its place -- a useful place for certain functions, but not the prime place for defining the relationship between teachers, students and parents. They create instead human groups in successful schools and classrooms based on loyalty, commitment to one another, and dedication to professional goals and values which never show up on the organization charts. The more we look at bureaucracy, the more convinced we are that its values are antithetical to successful education, and that we have gone too far in the bureaucratization of our schools. We are also aware that we have gone there in part in the name of "accountability," which gets us back to the need for groups like our own to re-think our roles and strategies.

2) Secondly, and very relevant to the current budget crisis, once we see the student as the prime producer of learning we can open our eyes to many learning resources that have been neglected or unused. Certainly skillful teachers and principals are needed to create productive learning partnerships, but educational bureaucracies have seen it as to their advantage -- at least until the current financial crisis -- to convey the idea that learning can only come from them, and that if we want more of it we must give them more money or more power or both. There are many things that can increase student learning that cost little or no money, and there are many things that cost a great deal of money that produce little or no increased learning. To give one example of this principle: peer tutoring almost always works if it is halfway decently run -- and

it works as much or more for the tutor as for the tutee; yet it is almost never used. Why? Because it does not fit the conception -- or the vested interests -- of service delivery. To say that only certified, professionalized and bureaucratized teachers can produce learning means that if you want more of it you must hire more teachers or otherwise increase the service delivery machine.

3) Thirdly, far from letting schools "off the hook," a partnership approach will actually increase accountability -- especially the kind of accountability needed in education -- namely person-to-person accountability, rather than remote-control political and bureaucratic accountability. So long as parents are on the outside complaining, teachers can effectively fend them off through their collective strength and bureaucratic shields. But once parents are accepted as responsible partners, it will be much more difficult to hide and ignore the fact that Miss Jones is not doing her job. This is why, although school rhetoric is full of talk about partnership, true partnership relationships are often resisted. The initiative for change will have to come from parent and citizen groups.

4) Fourth, and perhaps most important for its application to other social services, partnership is a concept that can lead to the long-sought-for "empowerment" of what we have been calling the "client" -- a word which, as Audrey Cohen points out, itself signifies an unhealthy dependency. "Service delivery," for all its good intentions, tends to dis-

empower those whom it intends to help. This is especially true when the "service" is compulsory, or provided at the initiative of the service deliverer. Teaching may be a service, and schooling may be a service, but education is not a service; it is a process of growth. It must come from the person being educated. In the case of children, who are inherently dependent, it must also be supported by the child's family, community or peer group -- or whatever human group or combination of groups the child relates to for his values and nurturing while still in a dependent status.

Present public school ideology, on the contrary, signals to parents, students and communities that education will be "delivered" to them -- that their role is basically passive -- to be ministered to by the beneficent teachers and schools that society has provided for them. It leaves them with no real responsibility, and therefore, ultimately, no power in the situation. This is why partnership is important even for political accountability (which is a necessary, even if not primary, relationship between parents and schools in a democracy). Without partnership, only the political activists become involved; with it every parent and student is involved in an active way -- positioned to become politically active when necessary. This again is perhaps why school bureaucracies, while they talk partnership, are ultimately fearful of it.

So much for a few highlights of the changes in our thinking that

might come from a shift from service delivery to partnership in education. I want to add just a word or two about the application of this change in New York City in the coming decade.

I am well aware that things look pretty gloomy for public education not only in this city, but across the country, and I would not underestimate the difficulty of the battles that lie ahead -- on budget, collective bargaining, the politics of running the schools, and a dozen other issues. But in some respects this is a particularly propitious time for making the change in approach that PEA is advocating:

- (1) In the first place, the financial crises is forcing a re-examination of old assumptions. In urban schools we were doing a disastrous job even before the crisis, and now there is not enough money even to do the disastrous job we were doing before. So it is becoming ever clearer to more and more people that fundamental changes are needed.

For the first time, for instance, as a result of the financial crisis we have been able to get people to look seriously at budget priorities. When we started urging priority budgeting and reallocations of funds in the early seventies because our analysis showed that expenses were outstripping revenues, there was little movement for change. People both in and outside the system kept hoping that new money would be found and

that reallocations would not be necessary. When the financial situation finally became a crisis, at least the civic community, if not the education establishment, realized that changes had to be made and responded positively to the establishment of the Educational Priorities Panel -- a coalition of twenty-five civic groups -- which has pressed for and obtained shifts of funds from bureaucracy to the classroom. Now we must move beyond dollar resources and realize that two schools with the same conditions and the same funding can produce very different results depending on how well they use the human resources -- both budgeted and non-budgeted -- involved in the learning process.

- (2) In the second place, in education we have the benefit of a social and political movement that is beginning to set clearer learning goals for the schools. The minimum competency movement is sweeping the nation, and has been embraced by both the State Board of Regents and Chancellor Macchiarola in New York City. Many educators are resisting it -- in my opinion, because it exposes one of the more pernicious stratagems of educational service delivery systems -- namely the blurring of goals so that even political accountability is foiled. Up until now, not only the operation of schools, but the leadership of American education, and the power to define its goals, has been delegated to the

professional bureaucracies. The minimum competency movement represents at least a partial reclaiming of the public's right to set educational goals.

One might think it unfair to lay down tougher learning goals just at the time when we are also so hard pressed financially, but from the point of view of change -- particularly the kind of change that we are advocating -- that can open up learning resources now vastly underutilized -- this combined pressure to produce better results with fewer dollar resources, provides an advantageous climate. If there were either, on the one hand, a continuation of fuzzy goals so that deteriorating results could not be measured against expected results, or, on the other hand, continued unlimited funds so that unproductive practices could be funded ad infinitum, there would be much less chance for change.

The combination of clearer learning goals with the idea of shifting to a collaborative rather than a professional delivery model for education, in our opinion makes a particularly powerful combination. For the first time there is the potential for a widespread public will (i.e. potential political power to counter the political power of the education establishment) around the idea that every child can learn, and a way to ensure that every child in fact does learn (i.e. don't leave it

entirely, in the hands of the professionals and government bureaucracies).

- (3) In the third place there is a fund of experience in New York on which to build the new strategies. There are many veterans in this room -- and elsewhere in the city -- who have learned a great deal from both the successes and failures of the past. Don't assume that all the education initiatives in which you have invested your foundation dollars, and in which we citizen groups have invested our time and energy, have been failures. Some of the programs of the past have already pointed the way to the new directions. The School Volunteer Program which PEA set up with foundation funds twenty years ago is now part of the school system and is going strong. It could grow even stronger if the city would begin to see education in terms of learning partnerships instead of service delivery, since learning partnerships lie at the very heart of the school volunteer program. Last year, when we launched our emergency competency tutoring project, the number of school volunteers grew from 5,000 to 8,000. Someday we hope to see 100,000 volunteers in the schools in various capacities. That is not too many for a city with nearly 1,000 schools, once it decides to use all the learning resources available. New Yorkers will respond when they see they are needed, but because of our service

delivery mentality we have not seriously asked them.

A second initiative that many of you helped start was the alternative school movement, which many people now think has died. We do not agree. It has gone into decline because, again, it did not conform to the dominant bureaucratic service delivery model. One of the survivors of this movement -- the Bedford-Stuyvesant Street Academy still survives in central Brooklyn. When we took over sponsorship of the program last year, we commissioned a study by Professor Joseph Grannis of Teachers College to find out if it indeed was benefitting its students, and if so, why. The results are extremely interesting and positive. Professor Grannis himself was surprised to find such significant improvements in academic achievement, attendance and behavior. Even more significant, however, his careful interviewing, observations and questionnaires confirmed our assumption that it is the non-bureaucratic values of the school that explain a good deal of its success. He reported a typical incident in which a student started hassling a teacher in class, and instead of the teacher having to correct him (or more likely just letting the behavior persist), the student sitting next to the offender said, "Billy, you're not respecting Miss Jones." Respect is a key word in the value system of the Academy, and it goes a long way in creating a sense of partnership in which

both teachers and students can be more productive.

Our interest in the Street Academy is not only the several hundred students it directly helps each term, but the lessons it holds, and the leverage it might provide, for change in the system. We have been keeping the Chancellor and Nat Quinones, the head of the high school office abreast of the results of our evaluations, and this spring we were gratified to see that he has placed one of the new dropout centers in the same building with the Academy and has had Thom Turner, the Director of the Academy, training the center's staff. Our strategy is not only to demonstrate that learning environments can be successful but to make sure that what is being learned from the Street Academy experience, as well as the many other successful alternative schools and learning environments around the city, becomes incorporated into the policies and practices of the whole system. Much has been learned from the alternative schools and the time is ripe to capitalize on these lessons to move the system away from bureaucratic service delivery to collaborative and partnership relationships.

Another set of experiences that provides a base for moving from service delivery to partnership is the work that has been done on integrated human services. At first sight this may look only like a way to deliver services more efficiently, and in many in-

stances it does accomplish that desirable result. But where it is successful, one of the reasons is that the value structure changes. Service integration shifts from each agency delivering its separately and professionally defined service, to one of responding to individual human beings in all their ideosyncratic complexity. In many cases the response is on a direct personal basis, with staff crossing professional lines, and bureaucratic job descriptions blurred.

The tendency thus far to see integration of services in bureaucratic service delivery terms is probably one of the reasons it hasn't gotten very far as yet. We have been expecting the agencies to respond to our proddings (and sometimes their own leaders' genuine intentions), when in fact it is not in the interest of bureaucracies to integrate their services with other agencies. Their interest is to maintain as much control as possible over their empires. Monopoly and expansion are their normal instincts. Integration of services will come about -- and in the current climate is more likely to come about -- from the involvement of citizen interests, since they have a genuine interest in improved services rather than in preserving bureaucratic empires. We are seeing an example of this in the Regent's New York City Project, which PEA pro-

posed exactly to bring together consumer and provider interests to explore productive relationships. With Regent Joe Bongiorno in the lead and a committee made up of union and bureaucracy representatives as well as PEA and other consumer representatives, progress is finally being made on the long advocated idea of integrating health services and schools. Both the state and the city have agreed to move ahead on having health service agencies provide health screening and clinic services to school children, something neither the health nor the education bureaucracies would have done on their own, without citizen input.

In short, the climate is ripe for change, and the many experiences we have all had together should put us in a position to make the shifts now needed. We do not claim to have a complete answer, but think we have hold of a powerful idea, and we are pursuing it through coalition activity, research, policy analysis, advocacy in all the many enterprises of which we are a part such as the Urban Coalition's Local School Development Project and the Regents New York City Project, and where necessary through litigation. Disastrous as the present situation is, we think an avenue has opened up in which all of us can begin to work together to find productive solutions to educational failure. But there is still much to learn as this idea unfolds, and the foundation community can provide an invaluable contribution in helping to shape it and filter it through its own varied experiences and accumulated wisdom.